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ABSTRACT

A report is given of a survey of 170 sophomores enrolled in advanced English classes and 205 sophomores enrolled in regular English classes. The students were questioned about their career expectations, their perceptions of teaching as a career, and current incentives for entry into the teaching profession. Findings indicated that only a small percentage of the students were interested in becoming teachers. Most students reported being discouraged from teaching by their own teachers and by parents who are teachers. Even for those students who possess altruistic career orientations, teaching was an unattractive career choice given the occupation's poor working conditions. Most of the students were generally oblivious to recent reforms in the teaching profession and underestimated teacher salaries. The first section of the report reviews relevant literature related to teaching as a career choice. Section two describes methods, including the overall approach, sampling and site selection, and data analysis. In section three, cross-site findings are delineated, including career expectations of the focus group, their views of teaching, and their views of particular incentives for entry into teaching. The final section contains conclusions and policy recommendations for state policymakers. (JD)

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Recruiting the Next Generation of Teachers: Conversations with High School Sophomores

by Barnett Berry
Christine McCormick
Tom Buxton

January 1989

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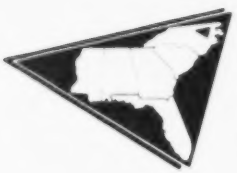

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For policymakers who wish to make teaching more attractive to talented young people, this study of high school sophomores and their perceptions of the teaching profession presents very disconcerting news. Conducting focus-group interviews with 375 students in advanced and regular English classes in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, the researchers found that:

* Two hundred seventy-five of the students plan to attend college immediately upon graduation. Of these, only 5.8 percent indicated an interest in becoming a teacher. Professions such as business management, medicine, law, and engineering are the careers of choice--especially for the advanced students.

* Of the 170 advanced students interviewed, only 2 percent (n=4) indicated an interest in teaching as a prospective career.

* Of the 205 regular students interviewed, only 105 plan to attend college immediately upon graduation. Of these, 12 percent (n=12) indicated an interest in becoming teachers.

* Most students--irrespective of race, gender, or school location--expressed negative opinions about teaching as a career alternative. In focus group discussions, students cited teachers' boring and routine work, lack of autonomy, poor pay, limited opportunities for advancement, and frustrating working conditions as reasons for being discouraged from teaching.

* These students see teachers as being disheartened and stymied by the conditions of their work. They see their teachers as having little autonomy to teach what they believe is appropriate and receiving little administrative support with regard to student discipline problems.

* Students reported being discouraged from teaching by their own teachers and by their parents who are teachers.

* Frustrating working conditions may inhibit teacher enthusiasm and, in turn, may translate into "boring" learning experiences for students. Concomitantly, "boring" school work for students may translate into their perception of teaching as "boring" work.

* The students--especially those enrolled in the advanced classes--believe that being a teacher would neither allow them to exercise technical skills and expert judgments nor to have flexibility and fun on the job.

* Black and female students are more likely to seek careers that would allow them to help other people. Yet, even for those students who possess altruistic career orientations, teaching was an unattractive career choice given the occupation's poor working conditions.

* Few students, even those from rural areas, intend to seek careers in rural areas because of limited career and social opportunities.

- Students seek careers that would provide a comfortable physical working environment, unlike the environments in which their teachers taught. For some, their teachers work in sweltering, dilapidated buildings.

- Generally, students have realistic perceptions about the salaries earned by professionals--except teachers' salaries, which they tend to underestimate.

- These high school sophomores were generally oblivious to recent reforms in the teaching profession (e.g., college loan programs, salary increases, and the limited merit programs presently being implemented in their respective states). The few students cognizant of recent reforms do not believe new teacher improvement policies are having a positive impact on the teaching profession.

Teachers are an effective conduit for delivering information to students about school reforms and incentives to enter teaching. Unfortunately, the message they send is not very positive and often paints a pitiful picture of the teaching profession and efforts to improve it. Therefore, making teaching attractive to young people will require making teaching attractive to today's teachers. In order to accomplish this, decisionmaking should be decentralized, and talented teachers should be given the time and resources to influence curriculum, testing, and discipline policies. Compensation packages should be altered, and talented teachers should be given the opportunity to earn professional salaries commensurate with their expertise and accomplishments.

To have a positive effect on the future teacher labor market, the new autonomous, well paid, professional teacher must be visible to his or her public school students. Toward this end, policymakers should begin to implement straightforward programs for students that will promote accurate information about the teaching profession and other professions as well.

Specific policy recommendations include:

RECOMMENDATION ONE: State policymakers should initiate new policies to further enhance the teaching profession. Such policies include: 1) higher mid- and late-career salaries, 2) internship programs that promote professional development for novice teachers and leadership opportunities for veteran teachers, 3) more flexible career opportunities for veterans, 4) new organizational structures that facilitate meaningful teacher input into school policy decisions, and 5) more flexible scheduling that could promote teacher collaboration and autonomy. Such policy initiatives would contribute to the "deisolation" of teaching and help to legitimize differential compensation for teachers. They would also change the conditions of teaching that seem to serve as the strongest disincentives to entry into the teaching profession.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: State policymakers should initiate in-school programs to enhance the image of the teaching profession. These programs should be designed not only for students, but also for teachers.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: State policymakers should initiate in-school programs for students that would provide not only accurate information about the teaching profession but also accurate information about other professions such as law, accounting, and business management.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: State policymakers should monitor carefully recent reforms to enhance the teaching profession, such as merit pay and career ladders. If the programs are not enhancing the profession, then evolutionary changes must be made for the benefit of students, teachers, and taxpayers.

I. TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH--THAT IS THE QUESTION

> Teaching is boring work. I could not imagine myself being a teacher. They are always being told what to do. It does not look like you can excel in your job. You just sit there and teach them, doing the same thing all the time.

Unfortunately, this comment is typical of the ones made by students during this investigation of high school sophomores' attitudes toward the teaching profession. Drawing upon focus-group discussions with 375 tenth-grade students in diverse schools in three southeastern states, the research team uncovered some of the more subtle and complex factors influencing students not to choose teaching as a prospective career.

The researchers visited inner-city, suburban, small-city, rural, and isolated rural high schools in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. In these schools, they conversed with 170 sophomores enrolled in advanced English classes and 205 sophomores enrolled in regular English classes. Students were questioned about their career expectations, their perceptions of teaching as a career, and current incentives for entry into the teaching profession. For those policymakers who wish to attract young talent into teaching, the interview data are not very encouraging. In fact, in most respects, the findings are quite disconcerting.

The remainder of this section reviews relevant literature related to teaching as a career choice, which will set the stage for describing, analyzing, and interpreting the interview data. In Section II, methods, including the overall approach, sampling and site selection, and data analysis, are described. In Section III, cross-site findings are delineated, including: 1) the career expectations of focus group participants, 2) their views of teaching, and 3) their views of particular incentives for entry into teaching. In Section IV, based on the data and the literature described herein, the authors offer conclusions and policy recommendations.

The Context for Choosing Teaching as a Career

Over the last two decades, there has been a precipitous decline in the proportion of young people with a career preference for teaching. Indeed, between 1966 and 1985, there was a 71 percent decline in the number of college freshmen planning to pursue teaching careers. Specifically, the percentage of college freshmen indicating a primary interest in teaching dropped from 21.7 percent in 1966 to 6.2 percent in 1985. Since 1985, the percentage of freshmen who intend to enter teaching has risen slightly--to about eight percent (Cooperative Institutional Research Institute, 1987).

Still, the prediction remains the same: supply and demand will continue to be imbalanced with far more projected classroom vacancies than certified teachers to fill them (Wise, 1988). Between 1989 and 1993, American school systems will need to hire well over one million new teachers to fill the vacancies that will be produced by increasing enrollments, retirements, and other turnover (National Center for Education Statistics, 1984). If traditional teacher retention patterns persist, an estimated 23 percent of each year's college graduates will have to enter public school teaching unless other sources of supply are tapped. Rural and inner-city school districts will be hardest hit by the impending teacher shortages (Wise, Darling-Hammond, and Berry, 1987).

What follows is an overview of recent attempts to make teaching a more attractive career and a review of recent research on career choice and teaching--both of which provide the context for this analysis.

Making Teaching Attractive in the 1980s. The decade of the 1980s has witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in and concern about the nation's teaching force. In part, this interest has been spawned by the highly

publicized report, A Nation At Risk, which claims that our nation is "at risk" due to the weak performance of our students, the strong performance of students in other countries, and the increasing productivity of foreign competitors (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). However, it is not yet clear that the teacher reforms of the 1980s have provided meaningful incentives for talented individuals to enter and remain in teaching (Darling-Hammond and Berry, 1988; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988).

The reforms of the 1980s have raised beginning teachers' salaries to the point of no longer being a disincentive for entry into the profession. In the Scutheast, it is estimated that beginning teachers earn between $17,000 and $20,000. However, the gap between beginning salaries for teachers and beginning salaries for novices in other fields has not been eliminated (Darling-Hammond and Berry, 1988).

Meanwhile, mid- and late-career teacher salaries are still woefully low. The 35 percent nationwide increase in average salaries between 1980-81 and 1985-86 only returns teachers to their average, adjusted-for-inflation, salaries of 1970-71. The average teachers' salary nationwide in 1987-88 was slightly over $26,000. In the Southeast, some statewide salary schedules limit mid-career teacher salary increases to only one percent a year. Thus, the effect has been to narrow the gap between the salaries of novice teachers and twenty-year veterans. In several southeastern states, a teacher with 15 years experience and a master's degree may earn only $6000 more than a than a 22-year-old novice teacher fresh out of college (Darling-Hammond and Berry, 1988).

State policymakers have either been unable or unwilling to significantly increase veteran teachers' salaries across the board. Despite significant efforts to implement some kind of performance-based compensation for teachers,

for the most part the states' efforts have not been very fruitful. Many of the performance-based systems have suffered from the same technical and political problems experienced by merit pay plans in the past. For example, teachers have not legitimated many of the statewide merit pay plans because most do not fit their conception of effective teaching and, therefore, have failed to identify "meritorious" teachers (Darling-Hammond and Berry, 1988).

If policymakers cannot create adequate financial incentives for talented people to become teachers, then working conditions should be optimal to compensate for the salary differentials between teaching and other professions. Unfortunately, there is considerable evidence to suggest that many of the reforms that came on the heels of A Nation At Risk have led to a deterioration of teachers' working conditions. This deterioration is characterized by larger caseloads of diverse students, burdensome paperwork, increased regulation of and political interference in teaching, and less preparation time (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988).

Poor working conditions frustrate teachers, causing them to lower their aspirations, to become apathetic, and to "settle for just getting through the day" (McLaughlin and Yee, 1988, p. 40). If teacher morale is low and their enthusiasm for teaching has waned, then they can hardly be expected to excite their students about learning, schooling, and, ultimately, teaching as a career. In fact, today's frustrated teachers do not necessarily leave teaching. Rather, because of limited alternatives, they stay behind and become "negative recruiters" for the teaching profession--telling their students through words and actions, "DO NOT BECOME A TEACHER!" (Berry, 1984).

Recent Research in Career Choice and Teaching. It is reasonable to suggest that many talented individuals do not choose to teach because of the

greater financial rewards offered in other professions. Nonetheless, while several studies confirm that high school and college students choose not to teach because of the lack of monetary compensation in the profession, other studies point to such factors as inadequate facilities and poor student discipline as critical in students' decisions not to teach. The remainder of this section briefly summarizes recent studies of young peoples' attitudes toward the teaching profession.

Though sparse, recent research related to teacher recruitment has focused on the attitudes of either high school juniors and seniors (Clark, 1987; Kemper and Mangieri, 1987; Education Standards Commission, 1985; Mangieri and Kemper, 1984; Page and Page; 1984; and Roberson, et. al., 1984) or college students (Jantzen, 1981; Bergsma and Chu, 1981; Jamar and Ervay, 1983; Berry, 1985, 1986). Most of these studies have utilized large-scale surveys or post-hoc quantitative analyses of national data bases; two have used in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis.

Mangieri and Kemper (1984) surveyed over 4,000 high school juniors and seniors in 6 states. They found that students who are interested in teaching rate themselves as having high knowledge in a subject area and express a desire to work with children or adolescents. Page and Page (1984) conclude from their survey of over 2,000 respondents that high school seniors who consider teaching as a career make their decision earlier in their public school experience than previously thought. Many "would-be" teachers consider teaching in grade school and junior high school and make firm decisions during their initial years of high school.

This finding meshes well with the findings of earlier research that points to the importance of public school teachers' influence on students' decisions

to teach or not to teach (Fieldstra, 1955; Richards, 1960; Lortie, 1975). In fact, the teacher-mentor role can be so persuasive that many teachers generally will end up teaching at the same grade level and in the subject area in which they were influenced as students (Berry, 1984).

Other recent studies in this literature consistently reveal several factors that discourage young people from choosing teaching as a career. Three large surveys of upperclass high school students each reveal that low salaries, poor working conditions, inadequate facilities, student apathy toward learning, and poor student discipline all contribute to negative attitudes about the teaching profession (Education Standards Commission, 1985; Mangieri and Kemper, 1984; Page and Page, 1984). Unfortunately, these data do not include information on students' race and the geographic location of their schools. Such data would be valuable given the critical undersupply of minority teachers as well as inner-city and rural teachers.

A recent survey of the career plans of high-achieving students in Georgia found that eight percent of the 564 respondents intended to enter the teaching profession. Sixty-four percent were not interested, and 28 percent were somewhat interested in teaching. These students indicated that the following conditions would need to be met in order for them to consider teaching: 1) reduce student discipline problems, 2) increase teacher salaries more rapidly, 3) create more opportunities for professional advancement, 4) improve working conditions, and 5) provide opportunities to work with brighter students and colleagues (Georgia State Department of Education, 1987).

Finally, a field study of the career expectations of college seniors in high-demand fields found that bright students do not necessarily shun a teaching career because of low salaries. Rather, they chose other professions

because they perceived teaching as involving frustrating working conditions, bureaucratic entry requirements, a lack of professional control, and few opportunities for intellectual growth. Many of the study subjects were also averse to working with students unlike themselves (Berry, 1985, 1986).

The research reviewed herein provides potential answers to questions generally asked about attracting talented individuals to teaching. Yet, what has been missing are several questions related to: 1) the perceptions of younger students' attitudes toward teaching, 2) differences in the students' attitudes by race and geographic location, and 3) students' attitudes toward 1980s-style teacher incentives. The framework used to pursue these questions follows.

II. METHODS

This section describes the methods used to select school sites, sample students, and collect and analyze data.

Overall Approach. This study primarily used structured, focus-group interviews, supplemented by a brief survey, to determine southeastern high school sophomores' attitudes toward: 1) the teaching profession and 2) current state-level incentives developed by policymakers to attract and retain talented people in teaching. Although the research studies reviewed above offer considerable insight into the problem of attracting young students to teaching, several questions remain:

* What are the specific attitudes of high school sophomores toward teaching vis-a-vis other careers and professions?
* Given that students make career decisions about teaching early in their public school experience, how do high school sophomores view current incentives to attract and retain teachers?
* How do specific attitudes toward teaching and teachers differ among high school students by potentially critical demographic variables such as race and location of school attended?
* What policies are most likely to attract talented young people to the teaching profession, enhance their retention as teachers, and improve the overall quality of the teaching profession?

To answer these questions, the researchers visited ten schools in three states. Schools were selected from inner-city, suburban, small city, rural, and isolated rural areas to capture the demographic diversity of schools in the southeastern United States.

At each school, 10th grade students in both advanced and regular English classes were surveyed and interviewed in focus groups. Prior to the focus-group interviews, a brief one-page survey was administered to each of the 375 sophomores. This survey collected demographic data, career choice information,

and salary expectation information (see Appendix A for copies of the student survey form and the interview guide).

The focus-group method was used for several reasons. First, student attitudes do not develop in social isolation. Attitudes are developed in part by interaction with other people. Also, high school students are known to be greatly influenced by their peers. Focus groups enable researchers to capture the development of group attitudes toward teaching. Second, focus groups have high face validity. Studies demonstrate that participants are more likely to share certain insights with researchers in a focus-group setting than they would on a survey or even in individual interviews (Krueger, 1988). Finally, in the case of limited time and funding, focus groups make it possible to increase the number of respondents in a timely and cost-effective manner.

The students were informed that the purpose of the interview was to understand their attitudes about future careers in general. The interviews consisted of several broad questions, followed by specific probes. For example, the initial interview question focused on the students' career plans and expectations. Follow-up probes focused on anticipated working conditions, issues of autonomy and control, salaries, other incentives, and career mobility. The next questions focused on the careers of teachers. Follow-up probes centered on the students' attitudes toward the school as a workplace, as well as their attitudes toward their own schooling and teachers. Finally, other questions focused on the attractiveness of teaching and of current state incentives offered to recruit talented individuals into teaching.

Site Selection, Sampling, and Interviewing. The three states from which focus group participants were drawn--Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina--loosely represent a broader region of the Southeast, which also

includes Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. Limited time and funding prevented the research team from interviewing students in all six southeastern states. Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina were selected for this study because all three were within easy driving distance of the research team, which is based in Columbia, South Carolina.

Five types of schools were chosen for the study. These types do not necessarily reflect textbook definitions, but conform more to cultural, sociological, and teacher labor market considerations identified in earlier studies (Berry, 1984, 1986). These types of schools are operationally defined below:

* Inner-city: a school located in a city of over 100,000 people, where the majority of students are minority and on the free-lunch program.
* Suburban: a school located in a suburb of a metropolitan area, where the majority of students are nonminority and not on the free-lunch program.
* Small-city: a school located in a city of less than 15,000 people.
* Rural: a school located in a town of less than 2,500 people, but within 35 miles commuting distance from a city of over 15,000 people.
* Isolated rural: a school located in a town of less than 2,500 people and more than 35 miles commuting distance from a city of over 15,000 people.

State department of education personnel in each of the three states were asked to recommend five schools that conformed to each of these definitions and that would be "representative" of the state's geographic and demographic mix. The selected schools were chosen randomly from the lists of recommendations. Two inner-city, two suburban, one small-city, three rural, and two isolated rural school districts were visited. Table A indicates the types and number of schools visited in each state.

The students were drawn from two 10th grade English classes identified by the principal at each of these ten diverse schools. The principals were asked

TABLE A

Number of Schools Sampled By State and School Location

State	Inner-City	Suburban	Small-City	Rural	Isolated Rural
North Carolina	--	1	--	1	1
Georgia	1	--	--	--	1
South Carolina	1	1	1	2	--

to select two English classes in their respective schools, one that enrolled above-average students and one that enrolled average students. Specifically, principals were instructed to define an above-average class as one that typically enrolls students who are in advanced placement or honors classes and an average class as one that typically enrolls students who are in regular, but not general or vocational, classes.

Unfortunately, the definition of advanced versus regular classes varies considerably by school size and location. The research team quickly realized that regular students in suburban high schools have far different career and academic expectations than regular students in isolated rural schools. In fact, a significant number of regular students in isolated rural schools do not intend to pursue an education beyond high school.

Principals also were asked to select classes that would provide a representative mix of students with respect to their school's gender and racial composition. Table B displays the number of students interviewed by academic ability and location. Table C displays the number of students interviewed by gender and location.

TABLE B

Number of Students Interviewed by Academic Ability and School Location

School Type	Advanced	Regular
Inner-City	26	34
Suburban	41	54
Small-City	13	10
Rural	62	75
Isolated Rural	28	32
Total	170	205

TABLE C

Number of Students Interviewed by Gender and School Location

School Type	Male	Female
Inner-City	30	30
Suburban	43	52
Small-City	9	14
Rural	84	53
Isolated Rural	26	34
Total	192	183

Because the attitudes of bright students are of particular interest to administrators and policymakers, Table D presents the number of advanced student participants by location, gender, and race.

TABLE D

Number of Advanced Students Interviewed by School Location, Race, and Gender

School Type	Total	Male	Female	Black	White	Other
Inner-City	26	13	13	24	2	--
Suburban	41	18	23	5	33	2
Small-City	13	5	8	4	9	--
Rural	62	40	22	36	26	1
Isolated Rural	28	12	16	11	17	--
Total	170	88	82	80	87	3

Teams of three researchers, who were trained in focus-group interview techniques, visited each school. Specifically, the researchers were trained in the art of: 1) asking focus-group questions (e.g., avoiding "why" and "yes-or-no" questions), 2) providing the appropriate context for respondents, 3) moderating the flow of discussion, and 4) controlling shy, rambling, and dominant participants (Krueger, 1988).

All students who were present on the day of the researchers' visit were interviewed in focus groups of five to eight participants. Each focus group interview was conducted by one interviewer, and each group discussion was audiotaped.

Data Analysis. Interviewers were responsible for describing and analyzing responses by question for each of the focus-group interviews that he or she conducted. The initial product of this stage of analysis was a set of 60 focus-group summaries. The summaries were formatted on data response forms that organized student responses by gender and race. The interview team met on several occasions to check for patterns and themes that emerged from the data as well as any inconsistencies found in the data. Then, a team leader used the data response forms and survey data to develop individual cases of the school sites. The 10 case studies were used to develop a matrix, displaying summary data and significant quotes by pertinent research questions. The matrix included cells that specifically displayed: 1) student attributes, including academic ability, race, and gender; 2) responses offered after interviewer probes; and 3) differences between the students' own career expectations and their perceptions of the teaching career. Case studies also were used to compare student responses by school location and, in doing so, determine whether or not students from different geographic locations possess particular

career choices or attitudes toward teaching. In addition, frequencies and descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of focus group participants, basic career-choice information, and salary estimation data.

The following section of this report summarizes student data, descriptive statements, and interpretation of the interview data, including student attitudes toward their careers and teaching as a career.

III. HIGH SCHOOL SOPHOMORES DESCRIBE THEIR PROSPECTIVE CAREERS AND TEACHING

The focus-group discussions about prospective careers and teaching as a career alternative were remarkably similar across types of schools and students. Not surprisingly, students were quick to say that they wanted careers that would allow them to make "lots of money." Importantly, though, many students--especially those enrolled in the advanced classes--spoke about the desire to secure future jobs that are challenging, fun, flexible, and allow for considerable autonomy and opportunity for advancement.

Unfortunately, these career expectations are totally at odds with their perceptions of the teaching profession. Most of the students interviewed--irrespective of school location, race, or gender--viewed teaching as a very low-paying job that is characterized by thankless, frustrating, and routine tasks. These students generally viewed teachers as lower-level functionaries who must meet unreasonable demands placed on them by contentious students, administrators, and parents. It is no wonder that so few of these young people could conceive of themselves as teachers.

When asked, "What would be the one thing that would get you to enter teaching?," students systematically gave responses like "nothing," or "$100,000 as a starting salary." Those few students who spoke positively of teachers and teaching were usually female and enrolled in rural schools. Still, these students mentioned the possibility of entering teaching only as a "last resort" or, for a couple of the female interviewees, because teaching would better enable them to "raise a family and keep house" than other careers. The following sections of this report provide a more detailed description of their career choices, career expectations, beliefs about teaching, and attitudes toward current incentives designed to make teaching more attractive.

Career Choice

Among the advanced students who completed the pre focus-group survey (n=170), most planned to enter business (23 percent), professions such as law and architecture (17 percent), medicine and other health-related occupations (17 percent), communications (11 percent), and engineering (10 percent). Among the regular students who completed the survey (n=205), many planned to enter blue-collar (e.g., construction), service-related (e.g., cosmetology), and military occupations. In fact, 50 percent of the regular students planned to enter these three career categories.

Students were asked to report their overall grade averages. Ten percent (n=37) reported a grade average of "A." Of these relatively few "A" students, 90 percent (n=33) indicated plans to enter business, engineering, medicine, law, architecture, clinical psychology, and communications. Only one of these "A" students planned to enter teaching.

Of the entire sample of students interviewed and surveyed (n=375), only 275 students planned to enroll in college following high school graduation. Of these college-bound students, only 5.8 percent (n=16) indicated some interest in becoming teachers. These few students can be characterized as fitting a "typical" profile of teachers (see Lortie, 1975). They were generally white (75 percent) and female (88 percent), from "blue-collar" backgrounds, and have demonstrated "average" academic ability. In fact, 69 percent of these 16 "prospective teachers" were enrolled in a "regular" academic track. These "prospective teachers" also generally characterized themselves as "C+" students.

Examining for differences in students' career intentions by race, black students were disproportionately represented in the groups that intended to

enter engineering and the military, while white students disproportionately intended to enter communications and teaching. Although black students comprised 44 percent of the students interviewed, 78 percent of those choosing the military and 54 percent of those choosing engineering were black. While white students comprised 54 percent of the students interviewed, 75 percent of those choosing teaching and 68 percent of those choosing communications were white.

When examining for differences in career intentions by gender, female students disproportionately intended to enter service occupations, teaching, social service, health-related occupations, communications, and the medical profession. On the other hand, male students disproportionately intended to enter blue-collar occupations, the military, self-employment, and engineering.

Female students comprised 49 percent of the students interviewed. However, females accounted for 90 percent of those choosing to enter service occupations, 88 percent of those choosing to enter teaching, 83 percent of those choosing to enter social service, 83 percent of those choosing to enter health-related occupations, 76 percent of those choosing to enter communications, and 67 percent of those choosing to enter medicine.

Male students comprised 51 percent of the students interviewed. However, 100 percent of those choosing to enter blue-collar occupations, 83 percent of those choosing to enter self-employment, 82 percent of those choosing to enter engineering, and 78 percent of those choosing to enter the military were male.

Examining for differences in career intentions by parental occupation, two particularly interesting patterns emerged. First, children of teachers were less likely to want to become teachers. They were more likely to want to pursue other professional careers. Second, those who intended to teach

primarily came from blue-collar backgrounds and would be "first-generation" college students.

Fifty of the students had parents who are teachers. Of these 50 students, 48 planned to enter business and the professions (e.g., engineering, law, medicine). Only two planned to teach. Several of these students commented that their parents have specifically discouraged them from becoming teachers.

> **My mother is a teacher and she has been telling me the last few years, "just don't be a teacher, just don't be a teacher." She has not seemed very happy with teaching and I guess she just wants me to be happy when I start work....She tells me I would be a great lawyer.**

Of the 16 students who intended to teach, 15 had fathers who were employed in social service, blue-collar work (factory work, farming, auto mechanics), or the military. Of these prospective teachers, 14 had mothers who performed factory work or who were service providers. Only two had mothers who were teachers. Although students were not asked about their parents' education, most of the jobs cited above do not require a college education.

Career Expectations

The focus-group discussions revealed a variety of information about these young students' career expectations and what they want in their future jobs as engineers, businesspersons, and lawyers. Without question, money was the foremost thought on these young people's minds. But definitions of "good money" varied. Not surprisingly, students from urban and suburban schools had higher salary expectations than those from small-city, rural, and isolated rural schools. For many students, $100,000--or even $1,000,000 a year--was the kind of salary they felt would afford them the "good life." Other students, especially those from the regular classes in the rural schools, believed that "$200 a week would be great." Both survey and interview data revealed that

the advanced as well as urban or suburban students were more likely to expect higher salaries.

Both blacks and females, especially those in the advanced classes, were more likely to seek prospective careers that would allow them to help others. In other words, high-achieving blacks and females appeared to possess a social consciousness that was not as evident among the white male focus group participants. These students planned to seek good salaries in their prospective careers, but earning a "good salary" was not their sole career objective.

> **Of course, it has to be a career that will allow me to help support my family. But, I truly want a job that will allow me to help others and where I can feel I am making a difference.**

> **I really want to be a lawyer....It all started a few years ago when I realized that I could do something good in this world. And lawyers can do that....They can do good, plus they can make a good living, a real good living.**

The students enrolled in the advanced classes were more likely to seek careers that would allow them to develop technical skills and fulfill personal interests. These same students sought careers that would be challenging, fun, and flexible. They also expressed a desire for considerable autonomy, opportunities for advancement, and self-respect in their prospective careers.

> **I want to do something that not anyone can do...something which would give me a sense of accomplishment. Few people know how to take out a spleen or something like that.**

> **I'd like everyone in my community to think that I have accomplished something....I want something that I can be proud of.**

In particular, black males, especially those seeking professional careers, seemed sensitive to the workplace issues of autonomy and control.

> **Another thing I like about being a lawyer is that not only can you help somebody but you can be your own boss.**

Authority and flexibility also were included in the students' lexicon of career expectations. However, these words meant different things to different students. For some, authority simply meant "not being bossed around." To others, authority meant "being able to do what you think is best" and "determining your own work hours." Overall, these latter career expectations were more likely to be held by advanced male students.

Finally, these students also considered geographic mobility when asked to ponder what they wanted in a career. In most cases, urban and suburban students were willing to move to other metropolitan areas in order to pursue their prospective careers. Because of perceived limitations in professional and social opportunities, these students would not consider working in rural areas.

While some rural students were very uncomfortable with the idea of leaving home and the "simple life," more rural students, especially those enrolled in advanced classes, expressed the desire to leave their communities. Some of them were quite eager to leave home because life there was "too slow-paced" and "boring." They were willing to "travel anywhere to experience what the real world has to offer." Some of them were willing to pursue almost any opportunity to "move 1,000 miles away" from their rural homes.

> **I've gotta get out of here....This place is boring. There is absolutely nothing to do. We do not even have a McDonald's or a movie theater around here. I can't imagine doing any kind of work here, except working in a factory or being a teacher and I do not know anyone who wants to do those [jobs].**

This "I've-gotta-get-out-of-here" attitude was heard consistently in the rural school interviews and revealed a critical problem in recruiting talented young teachers to rural school systems.

Teaching

Students' perceptions of teaching as a career emerged primarily from their own recent public school experiences and interactions with their teachers. Unfortunately, most of the students had numerous gripes about their experiences as students and, given their observations of their own teachers, gripes about the teaching profession. In focus-group discussions, students complained loudest about the following aspects of teaching: 1) boring and routine work, 2) lack of autonomy, 3) poor pay, 4) limited opportunities for advancement, and 5) poor working conditions. These five factors were the foundation for students' negative attitudes toward teaching as a career alternative.

Teaching as Boring and Routine Work. Unfortunately, many students were not excited and challenged by the education they were receiving. Thus, they did not see the work of teachers and their careers as exciting or challenging.

> **School is boring for us....It was not so bad at first during elementary school. But, now, teachers seem to teach the same thing every day over and over...and we have to do the same thing--like worksheets--over and over.**

> **Yeah, school is absolutely boring. I have not had many teachers that have been much fun....They lecture a lot of the time, then we answer the questions at the end of the chapter, then we have a test...over and over.**

Students also perceived teaching as boring work because they saw their teachers being told what to teach and how to teach it. They did not believe that teachers were given opportunities to make independent judgments, and they perceived their teachers' resulting dissatisfaction.

> **Teaching is boring work....Teachers have to follow the state curriculum. I do not think I could work like they do, having to do something step-by-step...exactly what [administrators] say. I would rather want to be able to teach students my own way. I wouldn't teach in the public schools, because they limit you too much and you have to be careful about what you say....If I teach I will teach in a private school where you can teach what you think is appropriate and you can put in everything [in the**

> curriculum] that you need to or that is important....In private schools, there is a good chance to broaden [students'] horizons.
>
> My teachers gripe to our class all the time about that we have to do this today and that tomorrow, that today and this tomorrow. I tell you one thing, they sure don't like it--not one bit.

Some of the bright students interviewed expressed the point of view that teaching is not a skilled act requiring technical preparation, adeptness, and proficiency. Students repeatedly said that teachers "are born, not made," and that to be a good teacher, one had to be "patient, love children, and be able to put up with all the aggravation" that teachers face. The researchers heard from a variety of students that teaching was for those "who can't do much else but have the patience to put up with us."

Students did not even mention skill and technical expertise when asked to describe what it takes to be a teacher. At the same time, many of the advanced students were clearly attracted to careers that require skill and technical expertise.

> I want to be a psychiatrist because you learn how to help people and people come to you because they want to be helped....It does not take that much learning to be a teacher--you just have to have the patience to deal with a lot of people who do not want to be helped.

Some students, especially from the advanced classes, did consider the value of teaching. They recognized the important role that a few teachers had played in their own academic development and in ensuring their future success in college and the workplace. A few students even recognized the creativity necessary for effective teaching. Some students felt that teaching was "potentially exciting" because of the "opportunity to watch kids develop." Others described their good teachers as being flexible, able to relate to

students, and willing to provide "information which was not in the book." For these students, teaching could be a challenging job.

Unfortunately, many more students claimed that a good number of their teachers were "bad." A "bad" teacher was one who either was "always lecturing at [the students]" or, in some cases, "not doing anything at all." Perhaps, because students could only describe a few "good" teachers, they could not translate their few positive experiences into a positive image of the teaching profession overall.

Lack of Autonomy. In many instances, especially in urban and suburban school districts, students perceived their teachers as impotent and "underlings."

> **Teachers can only boss kids and, then, only to a certain extent....They have to do what the principal tells them....They always have to get permission from the principal....Teachers have to follow rules....They even have to do what parents say.**

These students were quick to point out that teachers "get pushed around," which meant not only "being told what to do by the principal" but also "not having [other teachers] listen to them." But, perhaps more importantly, these students spoke about their teachers "getting pushed around by their students."

> **Some students at this school just want to beat up teachers.**

Moreover, students observed their teachers being subjected to the demands of administrator and parents. As one student asserted, "Somebody is always telling teachers what to do." As described previously, students were aware, either through direct observation or through teacher complaints, that teachers were limited in their capacity to teach what they believed was necessary or appropriate. One student, paraphrasing his history teacher, said, "I cannot help it....I know the textbook is boring, but we have to use it." Some students perceived that teachers always had to react to someone else's

initiative. Thus, when compared to other professionals, teachers were more likely to appear "stifled" in their efforts to teach.

Poor Pay. Given that most of the students were interested in pursuing careers that would provide very comfortable, even lofty, salaries, it was not surprising that they lamented the low salaries earned by teachers. But, more often than not, these students did not possess very accurate information about teachers' salaries. On the other hand, some did possess fairly accurate information about the earnings of other professionals.

To understand systematically how these students viewed teacher salaries and salary expectations in general, the researchers asked them to estimate salaries for ten different occupational categories: accountant, nurse, mechanic, lawyer, engineer, assembly-line worker, business manager, public school teacher, doctor, and plumber. On the survey that was administered before each focus-group discussion, students were asked to estimate for each of these occupations: 1) the beginning salary, 2) the salary after ten years of experience on the job, and 3) the highest salary one could earn.

Unfortunately, some students had very unrealistic perceptions. Some students estimated that a doctor makes $1,000,000 a year initially, or a plumber makes $400,000 a year after ten years on the job. Given this, the averaging of their responses only paints an unclear picture. However, examination of median responses for each of the ten occupational categories reveals more realistic expectations. Median figures for salaries estimated by the students are presented in Table E.

In general, both the survey and interview data demonstrated that students had a good idea of what some professionals earn. However, if there was one line of work for which students consistently underestimated salaries, it was

teaching. The median responses indicate that students thought teachers could earn only $14,000 initially, $19,000 after 10 years of experience, and a maximum of $24,000 a year.

> **When I was in elementary and middle school I wanted to be a teacher. But, then I heard how bad the pay was in teaching. So, now I am planning to become a physical therapist.**

Although teachers' salaries still lag behind other professions, they have dramatically improved over the last five years (Carnegie Foundation, 1988). Unfortunately, many of these high school students did not know this.

TABLE E

Median Annual Salaries Estimated By High School Sophomores (n=375)

Occupation	Starting Salary	10 years Experience	Highest Salary
Doctor	$33,000	$55,000	$85,000
Lawyer	30,000	45,000	65,000
Engineer	26,000	34,000	50,000
Accountant	20,000	30,000	45,000
Business Manager	20,000	28,000	38,000
Nurse	15,000	24,000	33,000
Mechanic	15,000	20,000	26,000
Plumber	15,000	20,000	25,000
Teacher	**14,000**	**19,000**	**24,000**
Assembly-Line Worker	13,000	18,000	22,000

No Advancement. Related to the problem of little financial reward, these students saw virtually no opportunity for advancement in teaching--a career expectation that was dear to their hearts and pocketbooks. As one student noted, "once a teacher, always a teacher."

> **[A woman] can become a secretary and have a better job because, at least as a secretary, she can get promoted.**

Some students regarded the principalship as a possible "step-up" on the teaching career ladder, but virtually no student saw the principalship as an attractive alternative. In addition, a few students considered a move from

elementary to secondary school teaching as a "step-up." But, their dismal description of teaching "bossy" teenagers "with an attitude" suggested that secondary school teaching also was not viewed as an attractive mobility route in teaching.

Perhaps, the most potent forms of advancement within teaching that did appeal to the advanced students in particular were being able to teach "only the bright kids" or being able to leave the public school classroom to teach in a college or university.

> **If I taught I would only want to teaching the [Advanced Placement] kids--at least they want to learn and they usually do not act out or get too bossy for their own good.**
>
> **I can see myself teaching in college one day after I make a ton of money in engineering.**

Poor Working Conditions. Because of teachers' lack of efficacy in dealing with disruptive students, students themselves were perceived to be the main source of poor working conditions for teachers.

> **Teachers have to put up with people like me. That is not easy. I would not put up with me. It has to make for a very stressful job.**

With this in mind, other students articulated their vision of the work life of teachers as: 1) enduring the futility of working from 7:30 to 3:30 with intransigent students; 2) going home in the afternoon with "headaches," endless paperwork, and lesson plans; and 3) "dying" prematurely because of stress-related "heart attacks." Some students spoke about stressful working conditions to the point of characterizing teaching as "terrifying." For them, teaching was "just too much work for such little pay," and there were "easier jobs which pay more and are more rewarding." Students from an affluent suburban high school also spoke of teachers' "rigid hours" and the fact that

they "even have to stay at school during lunch." In addition, some students pointed out that their teachers worked in "run down" and sweltering buildings.

Low pay, little opportunity for advancement, a lack of autonomy, and extreme working conditions primarily accounted for why these students considered teaching to be a career that affords little societal respect. Given these characterizations, the researchers were not surprised to find so few who were willing to teach in the public schools.

Incentives for Choosing Teaching as a Career

When asked, "What would be the one thing that would get you to enter teaching?", students systematically gave answers such as "nothing" or "no way." Some students, perhaps overdramatizing their distaste for the teaching profession, claimed that not even the threat of death could get them to teach.

To get me to teach, you would have to kill me first!

At best, only a handful of the 375 interviewees knew anything about their respective state's efforts to make teaching more attractive (e.g., college loan programs for students, increased base salaries, and merit pay). In fact, when a series of questions concerning teacher incentives was asked, many of the focus-group discussions became hushed. The students' lack of knowledge concerning college loan programs for prospective teachers was especially disconcerting, given the attractive and well-funded programs in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. Their lack of knowledge concerning merit pay programs was somewhat understandable. For instance, Georgia has yet to fully implement its career ladder program. Furthermore, the North Carolina career development plan and the South Carolina incentive pay programs have not been particularly successful and have yet to receive overall support from teachers.

Of the students who did know something about teacher incentives in their states, most saw the reforms "only making the schools look better" rather than truly improving education. For them, the new reforms in curriculum and standards for both students and teachers were further examples of the "pain" teachers endure. In many cases, students listened to their own teachers lament about school and teacher reforms of the 1980s.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

From the perspective of high school sophomores, state policymaking efforts to make teaching a more attractive profession have a long way to go. Of the 275 college-bound students interviewed, only 5.8 percent indicated an interest in becoming a teacher. Of the 170 advanced students interviewed, only 2 percent (n=4) indicated an interest in teaching as a prospective career. Professions such as business management, medicine, law, and engineering are the careers of choice--especially for the advanced students and the students whose parents are public school teachers.

The students--sounding like recent research and position documents criticizing teacher policy of the 1980s--voice clear complaints regarding teachers' boring and routine work, their lack of autonomy, their poor pay, their limited opportunities for advancement, and their frustrating working conditions. Irrespective of race, gender, or school location, these five factors dominated our conversations with the students and were the foundation for their negative attitudes toward teaching as a career alternative. The students' own career expectations contrast with their beliefs regarding the careers of teachers. The students--especially those enrolled in the advanced classes--believe that being a teacher will not allow them to exercise technical skills and expert judgments or to have flexibility and fun on the job. In contrast, these advanced students seek careers in which they will use skills and knowledge, in which they are well-compensated and rewarded for their accomplishments, and in which they can work in a comfortable, exciting, and lively environment.

From the data collected and analyzed, some of the more pertinent findings include the following:

* These students see teachers as being disheartened and stymied by the conditions of their work. They see their teachers as having little autonomy to teach what they believe is appropriate and receiving little administrative support with regard to student discipline problems.

* Students reported being discouraged from teaching by their own teachers and by their parents who are teachers.

* Frustrating working conditions may inhibit teacher enthusiasm and, in turn, may translate into "boring" learning experiences for students. Concomitantly, "boring" school work for students may translate into their perception of teaching as "boring" work.

* The students--especially those enrolled in the advanced classes--believe that being a teacher would not allow them to exercise technical skills and expert judgments or to have flexibility and fun on the job.

* Black and female students are more likely to seek careers that would allow them to help other people. Yet, even for those students who possess altruistic career orientations, teaching is an unattractive career choice given the occupation's poor working conditions.

* Few students, even those from rural areas, intend to seek careers in rural areas because of limited career and social opportunities.

* Students seek careers that would provide a comfortable physical working environment, unlike the environment in which their teachers teach. For some, their teachers work in sweltering, dilapidated buildings.

* Generally, students have realistic perceptions about the salaries earned by professionals--except teachers' salaries, which they tend to underestimate.

* These high school sophomores were generally oblivious to recent reforms in the teaching profession (e.g., college loan programs, salary increases, and the limited merit programs presently being implemented in their respective states). The few students cognizant of recent reforms do not believe new teacher improvement policies are having a positive impacting on the teaching profession.

Teachers are an effective conduit for delivering information to students about school reforms and incentives to enter teaching. Unfortunately, the message they send is not very positive and often paints a pitiful picture of the teaching profession and efforts to improve it. Therefore, making teaching attractive to young people will require making teaching attractive to today's teachers. In order to accomplish this, decisionmaking should be decentralized,

and talented teachers should be given the time and resources to influence curriculum, testing, and discipline policies. Compensation packages should be altered, and talented teachers should be given the opportunity to earn professional salaries commensurate with their expertise and accomplishments.

To have a positive effect on the future teacher labor market, the new autonomous, well paid, professional teacher must be visible to his or her public school students. Toward this end, policymakers should begin to implement straightforward programs for students that will promote accurate information about the teaching profession and other professions as well. Specific policy recommendations include:

RECOMMENDATION ONE: State policymakers should initiate new policies to further enhance the teaching profession. Such policies include: 1) higher mid- and late-career salaries, 2) internship programs that promote professional development for novice teachers and leadership opportunities for veteran teachers, 3) more flexible career opportunities for veterans, 4) new organizational structures that facilitate meaningful teacher input into school policy decisions, and 5) more flexible scheduling that could promote teacher collaboration and autonomy. Such policy initiatives would contribute to the "deisolation" of teaching and help to legitimize differential compensation for teachers. They would also change the conditions of teaching that seem to serve as the strongest disincentives to entry into the teaching profession.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: State policymakers should initiate in-school programs to enhance the image of the teaching profession. These programs should be designed not only for students, but also for teachers.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: State policymakers should initiate in-school programs for students that would provide not only accurate information about the teaching profession, but also accurate information about other professions such as law, accounting, and business management.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: State policymakers should monitor carefully recent reforms to enhance the teaching profession, such as merit pay and career ladders. If the programs are not enhancing the profession, then evolutionary changes must be made for the benefit of students, teachers, and taxpayers.

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